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ABSTRACT

Boundary crises for girls moving into adolescence were studied by analyzing "Seventeen" magazine to contribute to the discourse around redefining childhood. The border between childhood and adolescence appears to be moving downward, and as the boundary goes down, the moral panic in society often goes up. To analyze "Seventeen," a system of analysis was developed to use the three levels of textuality identified by J. Fiske (1987): primary texts, reader texts, and production texts. The "prom" issues of "Seventeen" (March) were analyzed for 1985-87 and 1999 for what they tell about the age and attitudes of readers. The current magazine is clearly targeted toward and being read by younger girls than it was in the 1980s. The presence of information about health and sexuality issues can be seen as survival information that complements the sex education classes children receive in middle school. In addition, the magazine now appears to appeal to the popular culture of the younger reader in a way that makes the styles playful literally and, by extension, metaphorically. (Contains 28 references.) (SLD)

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Nine going on Seventeen: Boundary crises in the cultural map of childhood/adolescence

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There we are in the flea market stall which features temporary tattoos - my partner and I, two women who are in our 50s and Monique and Estelle, two girls who are all of 9. As two couples awaiting our respective turns, we establish something of a bond, particularly around interest in each others' designs. Monique and Estelle have opted for matching butterflies that are painted on just at the shoulder strap of their tank tops. My partner and I go for the wrist tattoos. Some might regard my partner and I as the "odd women out" - after all, what do women of our age want with tattoos, and whatever will happen when we get put in nursing care homes they ask? We look at Monique and Estelle as Spice-girls babes dressed in scant tops, fully apparent belly buttons, hip hugger bell bottoms and 3 inch sandals. At age nine, why aren't they home playing hopscotch? Alternatively, though someone else might ask what either couple is doing here since neither seems to be appropriately adolescent. (Field notes)

The tattoo-episode is one which interests us for the kinds of questions it raises about boundaries -- boundaries not only between apparent middle-agedness and adolescence but more specifically between adolescence and childhood and the ways in which the present-day state of "postmodern" childhood disturbs commonsense notions of what a child is. These questions are of interest to us for a variety of reasons, not the least of which is in relation to what they have to say about childhood as a social construction. Speaking of postmodern childhood as a new era of childhood, Kincheloe (1998) notes the significance of media/popular culture in contributing to this condition:

> As media push the infinite proliferation of meaning, boundaries between childhood and adulthood fade as children and adults negotiate the same mediascape and struggle with the same impediments to meaning making. Children become "adultified" and adults become "childified" (Aronowitz and Giroux, 1991; Best and Kellner, 1991). Boundaries between adulthood and childhood blur to the point that a clearly defined, 'traditional' innocent childhood becomes an object of nostalgia -- a sure sign that it no longer exists in any unproblematic form (Lipsky and Abrams, 1994; Postman, 1994) (170).

Far from regarding these shifting boundaries as being about lost innocence or the disappearance of childhood, our overall project looks at the ways in which popular culture operates as a contested site for feminist researchers and the popular press alike in relation to boundary crises around childhood. In looking, in particular, at "long-lived" popular culture texts for girls, those which have been around for 40 years or more, we have noticed how the border between childhood and adolescence is moving downward. Texts such as Barbie, the teenage model, who seem, on the surface to be directed at older girls, are most avidly consumed by the 5-8 year old market. We also notice, though, that as the boundaries go down, the moral panic often goes up, particularly in relation to the (hetero) sexualization and eroticization of girls, implied romance, and body image.

Our interest in shifting boundaries and boundary crises draws on feminist rethinkings of developmental psychology in relation to the "edge of adolescence" (Brown and Gilligan, 1992), and

to the ways in which childhood might be regarded as a social construction (Mayall 1999, James and Prout 1997, Buckingham 1996). We are particularly interested in developing what Barry Mayall describes as a "child standpoint" (Mayall, 1999) in which it is possible to mount a critique of children's social position in much the same way that a feminist standpoint offers a critique of women's position as a basis for restructuring social theory. What sets our work apart from the work of Mayall and others who are working in an area that might loosely be called "the politics of childhood" is in our focus. While others have focused on children's experiences of work, health, school and child rights in the research process generally, our project around popular culture might be seen to be located primarily within the world of commodified play and consumption that is largely unmediated by adults. Indeed, while adults may be the ones who actually provide the money to purchase Barbies, tickets to a Spice Girls' concert or popular magazines such as Seventeen, the choice of popular culture artifact or event is usually selected by the child. Similarly, the children's involvement with these texts is usually not constrained by adult participation or intervention.. Even in cases where adults either refuse or are unable to provide the financial resources to support the consumption of these texts, children in the Western world, and increasingly within a more globalized market, still have widespread access through television, Internet, school, by interacting with their peers, and through playground socialization.

We argue that this commodified play world for girls is one in which the moral panics are intensified. As Drotner (1992) has noted this moral panic seems to be directly related to the fact that the romance factor contained within girls' popular culture texts — "texts of desire" as Christian-Smith and others describe them -- are seen to link directly to sexuality, something, that as Valerie Walkerdine (1997) observes is also seen to be class-based. Middle-class values of child-rearing are, in a sense, violated by what appear to be symbols of overt sexuality. Thus, as we argue elsewhere (Reid-Walsh and Mitchell, in press) while little girls might say of their Barbie "she's just a doll, mommy", adults reading Barbie may be more likely to see this plastic doll, a teenager with large breasts and a boyfriend, as a symbol of sex and not attend to the ways that little girls actually play with her, or to the meanings that they make of her. Similarly, the Spice Girls may be enjoyed by little girls for their obvious performance-play. Adults often cringe at little girls dressing, lip-syncing and generally imitating the gestures and behavior of these sex symbols.

The idea of media or moral panic in relation to girls' popular culture texts also seems to be intensified due to their highly visual form. Girls' popular texts — indeed, by definition most of children's popular culture texts — are primarily visual, whether they be Barbie dolls, television shows, comics and other forms of material culture, or magazines such as Seventeen which are at least eighty per cent visual. As Anne Higonnet (1998) notes in her book *Pictures of Innocence: The History and Crisis of Ideal Childhood*, it is the visual representations of children over history - in paintings, photographs, advertising - that offer idealized or disturbing images of childhood. From the concern over child porn on the Internet to Calvin Klein ads for children's underwear, it is the visual aspects of this work that threatens to change our views of childhood. Higonnet observes:

> Pictures of children are at once the most common, the most sacred, and the most controversial images of our time. They guard the cherished ideal of childhood innocence, yet they contain within the potential to undo that ideal. No subject seems cuter or more sentimental, we take

none more for granted, yet pictures of children have proved dangerously difficult to understand or control (7).

It is not surprising then, that this highly visual culture directed towards children is associated with moral panic.

While there are any number of popular culture texts, ranging from Beverly Hills 90210 to the recent Spice Girls craze which appear to cross the boundaries of age, we focus on Seventeen magazine -- a text whose very name suggests later adolescence and which, because of artificial boundaries that exist either in the research sites (elementary school/high school) or in the research team (child studies/youth studies) is rarely studied within the context of childhood. However, as one young informants, a thirteen year old, observed: *"Nobody who is seventeen would be caught dead reading Seventeen"*. What she doesn't say is that Seventeen magazine, currently designated by the magazine producers themselves as having a readership of 12 to 24 year olds, down a year from 13-24 as the magazine advertised in 1991, is just as likely to be encountered by girls who are as young as nine or ten, the Monique's and Estelle's of the tattoo parlor. Seventeen magazine, we posit, offers an ideal site for an investigation of boundary crises because of the ever-changing age of the readership downwards, a feature which itself might be taken as a signpost of the fluidity of postmodern childhood. While we have anecdotal evidence to suggest that Seventeen has always had a readership outside that of a strictly adolescent one (Williams, 1998) and outside of a strictly female audience (Genia Soukhaddskaya personal communication), our point is really that the magazine itself has identified a broader -- and younger -- audience. We also focus on Seventeen magazine because it contains a particular richness in terms of multiple readings. Since it has been around since 1944, it thereby offering the possibility for cross- and inter-generational analysis. Described by Kate Pierce as the "queen of the teen magazines" (1990), it represents the mainstream of the mainstream of teen magazines, with an annual circulation in the United States of 12.5 million, outstripping such competitors as YM, Teen and Teen Beat. The particular relevance of Seventeen magazine to the study of "boundary crises"' is based on its position within the moral/media panic literature. As with other forms of "teen" culture now being engaged with by young girls, adults worry about the appropriateness of these texts for young girls. This builds upon a history of concern with regard to popular culture texts associated with fashion and beauty which are marketed towards young girls. Thus, we use an analysis of Seventeen magazine to contribute to the discourse around redefining childhood.

A method for reading Seventeen magazine

To date, the scholarship around adolescent girls magazines generally and Seventeen magazine in particular has mostly focused on the primary texts and has examined specific themes using a content analysis approach. Kate Pierce's article "A Feminist Theoretical Perspective on the Socialization of Teenage Girls Through Seventeen Magazine" (1990) compares issues from three decades: 1961, 1972, and 1985. While she sees a slight increase in feminist editorial content and articles on self-development in 1972, she sees a return to the earlier focus on beauty, fashion, cooking and decorating in the 1980's. Dawn Currie's (1993) discussion of the" greening" of Seventeen looks closely at how environmental issues and what she takes to be a false environmental consciousness

are promoted. Shelley Budgeon's and Dawn Currie's article "From Feminism to Postfeminism: Women's Liberation in Fashion Magazines" (1995) analyzes representative magazines from 1951, 1971 and 1991 to note a feminist subtext beneath the conventional emphasis on fashion and beauty. They analyze how these contradictions may be resolved through a "post feminist" discourse which supports a woman-centered individualism and assumes equal opportunities for women. Gunilla Holm (1994) focuses on the regular August 'back-to school' issue of Seventeen in order to investigate popular images of schooling. Alternatively, Angela McRobbie in her early work on girls' magazines (1982, 1991) offers a semiotic reading of girl's and adolescent girls' magazines according to codes of femininity. Although her work has been based on several British magazines, Jackie and Just Seventeen, her ideas and approach have been highly influential.

In our investigation of the social positioning of children, particularly around boundaries and crises, we focus on the readership and appeal of the magazine. In order to examine the fluidity of boundaries respecting the targeted audience, and to move beyond a content analysis, we adapt the methodology of cultural theorist John Fiske (1987) where he analyzes television texts in terms of three models of textuality (primary texts, reader texts and production texts) to examining Seventeen magazine. Accordingly, the primary texts, would refer to the 12 monthly issues of Seventeen along with more recent "School Zone Special" for the Fall/Winter. The reader texts refer to what the readers themselves have to say, including, as Fiske notes their talk, their letters to the editor, or "their adoption of styles of dress, of speech, or even of thought into their lives" (286). The production texts refers to the texts produced by the culture industry itself. Speaking of the production texts of television, for example, Fiske observes that these include:

> studio publicity, television criticism and comment, feature articles about shows and their stars, gossip columns, fan magazines, and so on, They can provide evidence of the ways that the various meanings of the primary text are activated and inserted into the culture for various audiences or subcultures (285-6)

The production texts of Seventeen magazine thereby include not only direct interviews or public statements made by members of the production team but papers presented at conferences and so on. To complement our textual analysis of selected issues of Seventeen Magazine, we have searched the Internet for the magazine's presence in cyberspace, finding primarily primary texts aimed at the girls readers, and production texts, directed at potential investors. As will be seen, reader texts consist of space for daily on-line chat.

Fiske argues that because the 3 levels of textuality "leak into each other", they demand to be read together if we are to understand the meanings that people make of them. This point accords with our observation in the previous section that too often adults engage in close readings of the primary texts of the popular culture of childhood and youth without attention to the two other levels of textuality. Our attention here is devoted to mapping out a *system* of analysis using the 3 levels of textuality for the purpose of helping us formulate questions about shifting boundaries, rather than on providing an exhaustive reading of the texts..

Primary Texts

We focus on two "eras" of Seventeen, one within a contemporary context of the late 1990s, and the other within a mid-80s context, with our choice based primarily on personal access to primary texts and reader texts from these two time periods. To assist us in our reading, we exploit Seventeen's tradition of employing several regular themed issues in the course of the year: for example, March is the "prom issue", and August is the "back-to-school" issue. For the purposes of this paper, we choose the prom issues from 1985, 1986 and 1987 and the most recent prom issue of 1999 along with the "the prom lead-up" issue from February, 1999. While it might be argued that the "prom issue" has as much to say about the changing significance of the school prom as a cultural phenomenon in and of itself and thereby serves a less reliable indicator of shifting boundaries, it is important to note that any issue of Seventeen magazine, including the prom issue, contains a large number of components, ranging from ads, letters-to the editor, advice columns, feature articles about fashion, beauty, school and personal relationships, and unlike rival magazines such as YM, feature articles related to social and political issues. Thus, we see the phenomenon of the prom as located within a wider text and it is within this wider text that, we attempt to "read in" the readership appeal contained with the ads, feature articles, graphics and so on.

What strikes us about the prom issues from the 1980s are some particular age markers that might be read as indications of an older readership. For one thing, in the issues from the 1980s, the prom is not seen as something that is separated from marriage. This is represented seen most graphically in such ads as one about choosing a diamond ring (March, 1985), "Give her something that's forever. It could be the best 2 months you'll ever spend". Other ads in the same issue include one for a Canon Snappy 20/50 camera which is clearly aimed at getting good wedding pictures. In the March issue for 1987 there is an ad for Oneida cutlery which seems to be directed very much to the young modern woman preparing a hope chest. This matches another ad which contains a wedding photograph as part of an ad for Lennox china and crystal. Such ads complement what can be seen in other issues from the same time period which include one for Fanci-full hair colouring: "When you are under 25 you want to be discovered. When you're over 40 you want to be rediscovered". The younger readers, we would contend would be unlikely to identify even with the 'under 25' age, let alone being over 40 and potentially closer to the age of the grandmothers!

By contrast, the 1999 prom issue and the February, 1999 prom lead-up issue which also contains many prom references, contain no references to preparations for weddings although there is otherwise no shortage of what might be regarded as symbols of heteronormativity. What does intrigue us are what we see as "little girl" symbols. For example, in the prom issue we learn of the winner of the "dream gown" contest, a competition wherein the readers have been invited to design and sew a prom dress that is modelled on a Barbie-like fashion doll. In this issue we get to see the fully dressed doll (fig 1.) Interestingly, in the prom lead-up issue there is a feature article called "Living Dolls" which is based on 6 celebrities, actors such as Drew Barrymore and Katie Holmes represented as paper dolls, reminiscent of the Betsy McCall paper dolls of the 1950s, complete with several possible outfits that can be attached through tabs (fig. 2).

While it is not easy to "read" the prom dresses themselves since it is necessary to take account of

fashion trends as well as photography trends in advertising, what we have found is that the context for the prom dresses also has a type of age-related boundary. In the 1980s the ads, poses and so on tend to represent the dress and its wearer in conventional prom positions that take place at the ball itself. The tone appears serious, the models adult-like. The images in 1999, however, are more likely to show the prom-dress wearers in more playful positions — barefoot and on the beach (fig. 3) . Interestingly, we think, the male escorts are nowhere to be seen in photo lay-outs of the dresses, although they can be seen in other prom-related ads. These girls "just wanna have fun!"

Scanning www.seventeen.com/ the magazine web-site, which is aimed at seventeen readers, we see that the site appears to be aiming at a broad age range as does the paper version. It is carefully constructed in order to not replace the hard-copy magazine in any way. Although it has many features which are present in the paper version of the magazine, the most prominent feature is a "daily café" feature which consists of brief news clips deemed of interest to the readers. These change daily, for example, the news for April 9, 1999 consists of three items : one about a sports celebrity, another about a new study concerning the dangers of smoking for women, and a third about an underground magician—although there are links to previous more international news such as the bombing of Bosnia. There is also a link at the end for giving your opinion to the editors—indeed, this ability to interact with the writers or editors is present in all the columns. In terms of it's appearance, the site uses cartoon images which suggest a multicultural, American readership by showing images of a stylized and stylish "teen" girl whose age could be anywhere from preadolescent to late adolescent. While some of the specific features are targeted at a upper teen group: such as college information, others assume a driving-age audience, while others assume a sexually active (heterosexual) young woman. These are specific columns, however, which are buried in the site and are accessed through side-bars. The front page appears to be appealing to a broad age-range of readership due to the focus on common popular culture media: films, television, and music which could be consumed by the target population. The playful, almost parodic "look" of the cartoon images of girls strikes a postmodern feminist note similar to what Angela McRobbie has noted regarding adolescent girls' fashion in the U.K (1994) and the emphasis of the site is on popular culture, and leisure consumption. There were no fashion or beauty images-- just a few scraps of advice. While no coverage of social issues was immediately evident, the final section of the front page is devoted to a discussion of the physiological changes the teen-age boy's body undergoes at puberty.

Reader texts

Rarely have we found any reference to Seventeen magazine in the published work on popular culture and girls of nine to twelve or younger We acknowledge the limitations of accessing firsthand information about Seventeen-reading from nine or ten year-olds, in the same way that we acknowledge the difficulty of interviewing young girls about their Barbie play. David Buckingham found that adults, just by their presence in a study with children of television, can arouse the suspicion of the young respondents ("what are the adults up to now?") and, we might add in the case of Barbie or Seventeen, the suspicions of other adults. For example, the researcher might be thought to be violating certain ethical dimensions as in appearing to "promote" the text. Here we are

thinking in particular of securing permission to do research about Barbie or Seventeen with young girls. How does one ensure 'third parties or funding agencies that having what are to be 'neutral' discussions about Barbie are not influenced by either commercial gain (is Mattel or Seventeen sponsoring this?) or some sort of promotion of childhood sexuality?

Taking into consideration some of these limitations, our approach here has been to rely on two sources: published accounts in the magazine itself (letters from readers to the editor, letters to advice columns, captions with photographs contained in an article where the age of the subject is given) and interviews with local informants who are mostly 13 and 14 and who have been willing to either talk about their own experiences of reading 17 from an earlier time, or who refer to younger sisters and cousins.. While in our analysis of the letters to the editor we have found references in the more recent issues to 12 year old readers writing in, we have found no such references in the earlier issues of the magazines. While Seventeen at least maintains its 12-24 spread through representation of points of view and other references to these ages, we wonder whether they haven't also make a deliberate decision not to include references to readers younger than 12, both for Seventeen's own protection, but also as a strategy for ensuring the broadest readership. As is well documented in the work on children's reading generally, young readers are more likely to "read upward" rather than downward. A ten year old may find it "cool" to read about a fourteen year-old, but the reverse is not true .

In our interviews with contemporary readers, we have located several who have been buying the magazine since they were eleven or twelve. We have also spoken to several 'big sisters' who talk about the appeal of Seventeen to their sisters who are nine and ten. While these big sisters note that their little sisters "don't read the articles usually, but just look at the ads", they also acknowledge that Seventeen (along with magazines like YM) offers a type of "social training". Gwenyth, for example, describes the way that her sister and her friends, all avid consumers of the magazine, look at Seventeen in small groups. They pore over each full-page spread, choosing "their favourite model", "their favourite outfit" and so on. The older readers, as Gwenyth explains of her own group, all fourteen-year- olds, might do this choosing too, but they also read the articles.

Production texts

In scanning www.primemedia.com/ the web site of the parent company, we discover that Seventeen Magazine is briefly described in terms of its monthly circulation (2.4 million), readership (12-24, reaching one half of all U.S. teen girls, and one in five of older adolescents and young women 18-24, and history (since 1944). The continuity of production is stressed: while during World War II, Seventeen despite paper shortages had an initial run of 500, 000, now it has the largest paid circulation ever. The site describes Seventeen in terms of initially providing a service for young women. Then over the years it appears to have provided multiple (and somewhat contradictory) functions: it is defined as a "rite of : passage" and as an organ that "defines, socializes and empowers" young women. The brief description of its content juxtaposes the frivolous (beauty, fashion, trend, popular culture) with the serious (identifying social issues). By describing the present targeted readership by such a broad age-group, the production text can thereby represent the readers in a unified fashion, instead of the downward shift in the age of reader that we have noted in the comparative analysis of magazines from different decades.

Interestingly, this self-definition by the magazine in terms of being a vehicle for encouraging awareness of social issues was also promoted when one member of the editorial team appeared at a conference on "Educating Girls: A Development Imperative". In her conference presentation, Francesca Delbanco represented her magazine as being devoted to girls' esteem and social change, and with only a token head-nodding to fashion and beauty. Speaking as a feature writer, she refers to articles on the homeless, poverty, volunteer work in the community, and so on. This aspect of the magazine was also emphasized in one interview with a fourteen year old who volunteered the information that the reason she prefers Seventeen to magazines like YM and Teen Beat was because of its coverage of social and world issues such as Hurricane Mitch, the plight of refugees and so on. As Genia observes: "when your parents pick up a copy of the magazine and see what you are reading, they can see that you are reading about more than just fashion and beauty". Indeed, a feature article in the march 1999 prom issue concerned the Revolutionary United Front in Sierra Leone and the incidences of armed conflict around the world involving children. This piece is a good example of the kind of reporting on social and world issues that Seventeen promotes. There is no attempt to conflate fashion and beauty with world events in this coverage; the genre of text and lay-out could be in a serious, mainstream, news magazine such as MacLean's or Newsweek (fig. 4)

What are we to make of these textual readings of Seventeen magazine? After reading both the magazines and related web-sites in terms of Fiske's (1987) methodology of primary text, reader text and production text, a number of questions arise concerning possible implications of the downward age of the readership. We group these into two main areas: concerning the social issues content and the boundary crises.

First of all what is the connection between social issues content and downward age of readership?
What /how is this boundary crisis "resolved" textually?
Is the educational aspect in the popular culture text of the magazine considered as part of code of fashion, beauty and romance (McRobbie) comparable to the educational morsels in romance fiction that the readers in Janice Radway's (1984) Reading the Romance: Women, patriarchy, and popular culture mention when being interviewed?
Are the social issues or other educational information a "ruse" to make the text look respectable to over-shoulder-looking parents?
Is Seventeen an example of a heterogeneous text such as Barbie comics and Barbie cards which combine in one artifact texts of beauty, fashion, perhaps romance, and feminist history or social awareness?
Is this content an appropriation by a consumer industry of feminist or liberal views on social issues offensive? To whom?
Is the content "empowering" to the readers as the web-site claims?
Is this mix (shown as present in work of Budgeon and Currie to different degrees in different eras) a reflection of North American girls culture?

Secondly, what is the connection between boundary crises and the elision of age-boundaries of readership? By moving the age of the "teen" to preadolescence and even younger Seventeen magazine is being consumed by and targeting as potential readers girls who may still be playing with

Barbie dolls, and reading Nancy Drew mysteries while engaging in adolescent popular media culture of much music, high school television series and so on. How does this alter the media "landscape" of "youth" popular culture?
There appears to be a double concern about the downward-creeping age limit. Is not what excites critique not only the superficial "beauty myth" mentality that is present but the fear that the younger the girl child, the less able she will be to withstand the pressures of conforming to conventional Western femininity?
Is there not a downward age limit on adolescent popular culture? For example, Barbie producers have found there is a real lower age limit on doll play due to physical and cognitive development. Is that not true for other popular forms?

Seventeen through the lens of the 'history of childhood'

One scholar who has worked in the area of the material culture of childhood, Karen Calvert (1992), provides insight about how to think about some of these problematic aspects. Although her research is historically based, focusing on interpreting the artifacts of childhood from 1600-1900, in her conclusion she looks forward to the present day. Due to her long-range perspective she regards the present not axiomatically as being "new" but perhaps as containing motifs that were present in earlier centuries. She considers present-day childhood not only to be radically different from the Victorian ideal of protected innocence, but rather more similar to colonial times when children needed to live in the world and learn how to cope with its problems as soon as possible. As Calvert puts it, "The uninformed child is the child at risk." (153). Thereby, she does not consider it surprising that present day fashion does not stress children's innocent youth but rather imitates the sophisticated dress of adults with jogging suits, bomber jackets and so on. Similarly, she considers present day play behaviors that avoid childish types of play at a much earlier age than previously in the century to be of a piece with then need for sophistication and awareness. She even speculates "perhaps the Victorian childhood will prove to be a fluke, a somewhat claustrophobic idyll in the more common pattern of integrating childhood into family and community life," (153).

Although Calvert's use of the term "at risk" indicates that she appears to be thinking of practical knowledge concerning physical and psychological protection or readiness to cope with unexpected dangers in her discussion of the need for sophisticated childhood, her logic can be applied to the content of Seventeen Magazine. Since it is being read by and targeted towards younger girls, the presence of information about health and sexuality issues can be seen as necessary survival information. Indeed, it complements the sex-ed classes children receive in upper middle school. Exposure to important social issues presented "naturally" as part of the text of Seventeen provides a different but not less essential type of knowledge that is necessary in order to function as aware citizens. The feminist sub-text that Budgeon and Currie note is similarly part of this social education, and part of the mainstreaming of feminist discourse that is occurring throughout liberal popular media.

For feminists especially, the information about (adult) fashion, beauty and heterosexual mores , what Angela McRobbie considers the "code of femininity" is more difficult to reason through. On the one

hand, this is just another type of information about Western culture. On the other hand, what is offensive to the (primarily adult) onlooker is the extreme sexualization of some of the current fashions. At the same time, there is another trend towards sports fashion which emphasizes (youthful) vigorous strength, and appears somewhat androgynous. Regarding the latter trend, interestingly, Calvert makes similar observations about trends in (male) fashion attire in the late 18th century. During the Revolutionary Era, she sees a shift from a middle-aged, portly ideal of the early Colonial period to one which focused on a youthful, athletic male shape (151). The athletic teen fashion in Seventeen which emphasizes vigorous youthful activity could be extended to represent symbolic agency as well, suitable to the current cultural and moral climate. Concerning the former trend, it seems even to promote a hyper sexualized, look, one which Angela McRobbie (1994) notes is part of a postmodern feminist mindset. Moreover, as McRobbie notes, parody is an important aspect of postmodernism. We would like to suggest, as our analysis of prom issues from the 1980's and 1999 indicates, that there is a trend towards collage, and literal pastiche in the representation of "feminine" fashions. Not only does feminine fashion make a girl/woman doll-like, a fact noted by educational commentators in the 18th century, but now the fashions are literally on dolls--paper-dolls or Barbie-like dolls! In this way, the popular culture of the younger reader is deliberately appealed to, but it is done so in a "knowing" fashion that make the dressing playful literally and by extension metaphorically. Dressing gender is performance or camp as Judith Butler reminds us (1993).

Another feature of postmodernism is fragmentation, again a playful feature of dressing paper-dolls. This collage or montage effect occurs in the act of daily (middle-class) living. To be a 12 year-old now, the popular culture you might be engaged with could entail scanning Seventeen, dressing in a spice girls inspired outfit, working on a web-site to the tune of a much music video and you could even have your Barbie doll and teddy bear keeping you company. Following Calvert's lead, and bringing in the insights of sociologists of childhood such as James and Prout, we have to begin to redefine childhood in a post Victorian way.

A final observation concerning the elision of the two conventional boundaries of adolescence at the lower and upper age scale. Popular culture forms such as Seventeen textually extend the scope of the "teen" years. Regarding the textual feat of presenting this extended adolescence as if it were a single period or unit, this illusion is only present to adult onlookers, not the informed insiders—i.e. the young themselves. Now, no less than before, the young discriminate greatly among themselves by various means such as grade, age, height, physical maturity and so on. As Walter de la Mare long ago noted "the generations so to speak, of children are minute." 1935; 63-64).

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